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(11) L. A. Bennett

LOCAL ANÆSTHESIA FROM COLD.

At the conclusion of a paper on local anæsthesia in the *Lancet* of the 6th Inst., the hope is expressed that a case of death from Chloroform which had just occurred in one of the Paris Hospitals would be amongst the last. While that paper was in the press, and five days after its publication, two other deaths from this cause occurred in London Hospitals, in both of which insensibility might have been safely produced by local means. Can any practitioner interested in the welfare of his patient, or jealous of the character of his profession for humanity, longer hesitate about the necessity of a change of practice in this respect? Can he sanction Chloroform's longer, forming so strange an anomaly in Medicine? For, on what other occasion is it deemed justifiable to endanger life by the employment of a measure for which there is a substitute of perfect safety? And even were the only effects of Chloroform to be loss of consciousness, prostration, headache and sickness, why should the patient be subjected to these when insensibility can be produced without any unpleasant consequence by a momentary application of benumbing cold?

This change of practice is being rapidly made in France — In the *Medical Times and Gazette* of March 25th, I have quoted from a lecture of M. VELPEAU on the subject, and might also have referred to the same eminent surgeon's account of the operations in which he has produced insensibility by frigorific mixtures, when, in his recent work on diseases of the breast, he is speaking of the employment of congelation in cancer. "Who is there," says the Editor of the *Gazette des Hôpitaux*, (April 8th,) "that would not be happy to have such a means for the most common and usual operations, or those which every practitioner is daily called upon to practise without being specially a surgeon? Must not the surgeon henceforth be taxed with rashness, who having at his command this means,

“as sure as it is safe, should resort to general anæsthesia for any of the numerous operations which only require a superficial insensibility of short duration?” These remarks refer especially to the employment of the less powerful frigorific measures without any auxiliaries to extend their benumbing effect. The advantage of cold in the deeper operations is explained in the enclosed pamphlet. A writer in the *Dublin Medical Press* of the 10th Inst., speaking of the general opinion in France on the subject, says that in addition to all minor operations, it is considered fortunate that we can fall back on local anæsthesia in those deeper seated, when the patient is especially exposed to the danger of chloroform from cerebral or heart disease.

Cold can be applied by bringing in contact with the part, bodies already cooled to the required degree, or bodies undergoing a rapid change from the solid to the fluid, or from the fluid to the aeriform state. The application to the part of a strong current of artificially cooled liquid or air — or better still, of a metallic ball or oval which has been immersed for a few minutes in a freezing mixture, or a thin spoon or tube filled with this, constitutes a simple and efficient mode of producing various appropriate degrees of cold; though all of these are, in most cases, inferior to a bag or net of thin gauze containing the mixture. M. RICHET, Surgeon of the hospital Saint-Antoine in Paris, has just published (in the *Bulletin de Therapeutique* of the 15th Inst.,) a report of 13 operations in which a sufficient degree of cold was produced by the evaporation of ether; one of these being upon his own hand, which had become diseased from the absorption of putrid matter in dissection. The insensibility, however, is not only more complete from lower degrees of cold, but inflammation of the wound is so certainly prevented by them, that were it for this purpose alone, their use would be invaluable.

As one cause of the tardiness with which cold as an anæsthetic is adopted in this country, probably is the uncertainty about the

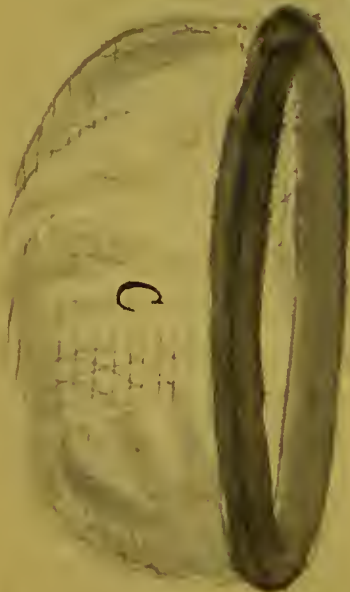
best mode of using the expedient, it will remove this impediment to mention that the simple apparatus required, the ball, spoon, or net, may be procured from the following surgical instrument makers, residing near the hospitals: MR. BIGG, St. Thomas' Street, MR. FERGUSON, Giltspur Street, and MR. MATHEWS, Portugal Street.* I shall, myself, be most happy to furnish any information on this use of intense cold, and (if requested) will deliver or send the remaining part of the accompanying pamphlet. If one life be saved by this mode of making the subject known I shall consider myself requited for the trouble; and it will be reckoned more than ample recompence, to be favoured with a statement of any facts connected either with local or general Anæsthesia.

* Altho' intense cold has been introduced into several English Hospitals as a remedy of disease, I am not aware that it has yet been employed in any hospital as an anæsthetic, except by Mr. PAGER, at St. Bartholomew's. In a letter with which he has lately favoured me, he mentions that "the trials I have made of it have been so satisfactory that I have no doubt I shall be able to extend its application. There is much reason to feel that we want a safer anæsthetic than chloroform."

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* The solid piece of metal may, as in cauterizing irons, be of any appropriate form. — The first degree of cold benumbs the part without blanching it. The second arrests the circulation & causes a tingling sensation. If the cold be continued the adposed part is congealed & hence its influence is suspended. To the greater degrees, the smarting that sometimes follows the return of the circulation, may be prevented by placing over the part a pig's bladder containing iced water.



The Apparatus, of a kind two kinds, used by

A a solid metallic (copper, steel) Ball
with a wooden handle to screw in

B a very thin metal sphere with a tubular
handle

C Gauge or hole set with ring of
paste board